

PUBLIC HEALTH NEWS & UPDATES

TEXAS RESEARCH-TO-POLICY COLLABORATION PROJECT

May 2024



Celebrate National Women's Health Week



We're Moving!



We're thrilled to announce that we're on the move! After much anticipation, the UTHealth Houston School of Public Health in Austin is relocating to a new space on Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. and San Jacinto Blvd. You will find us settled in our new space in June!

We will host an open house in early fall! Stay tuned for a save-the-date. Additionally, as we are in the phase of moving, please expect delays in correspondence and requests.

We look forward to continuing to support Texas policymakers' legislative priorities and provide data-driven, evidence-based health information to improve the health of all Texans!

Lunch & Learn Event Highlights



The most recent TX RPC Project Lunch & Learn presentation by Drs. Divya Patel (right) and Patrick Ramsey (left) discussed trends and prevention opportunities for [Congenital Syphilis in Texas](#).

Our next Lunch & Learn will be [Wednesday, June 12, 2024, 11:15 AM-12:30 PM](#), covering the [Texas School Physical Activity and Nutrition Survey](#). As usual, lunch will be provided!

TX RPC Project Health Policy Resources

Checking out our women's health-related reports, to celebrate the National Women's Health Week!

[Congenital Syphilis](#)

Released February 16, 2024

[Maternal & Child Health](#)

Released March 8, 2024

Congenital Syphilis

February 16, 2024

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. Texas has consistently had some of the highest reported cases of both syphilis and congenital syphilis in the country.^{1,3}
 - o In 2022, approximately 25% of the nation's congenital syphilis cases came from Texas.¹
2. Congenital syphilis can have major health impacts on a baby, but the extent depends on
 - o When syphilis was acquired
 - o Whether the mother received adequate treatment.^{4,5}

Background

Congenital syphilis (CS) is a severe, disabling, and often life threatening disease seen in infants whose mothers were infected with syphilis during pregnancy and were not fully treated.

- The rate of syphilis among the general U.S. population began increasing more than a decade ago, with exponential annual increases since 2018, contributing to the rapidly increasing incidence of syphilis among pregnant women.^{4,5}



In 2022, **922 cases** of CS were reported in Texas.



This was **50% higher** than the next highest incidence of 616 in the state of California.¹

Implications

Approximately 40% of babies born to women with untreated syphilis can be stillborn or die from the infection soon after birth.⁴

- Surviving infants may be affected by lifelong health issues including bone damage, severe anemia, enlarged liver and spleen, blindness, deafness, intellectual or developmental disabilities, or seizures.^{2,4}
- People infected with syphilis often do not have symptoms — known as latent syphilis — and thus may not be aware of their infection.⁵
- As a result, the lack of timely testing and adequate treatment during pregnancy are the main drivers of CS.⁷

TREATMENT FOR ACTIVE SYPHILIS IN PREGNANT WOMEN CAN REDUCE THE RISK OF STILLBIRTH BY ROUGHLY 80%, HIGHLIGHTING THE PREVENTABILITY OF THIS ISSUE.⁸

UTHealth Houston School of Public Health



Texas Research on Policy Collaborative Program

Maternal & Child Health

March 8, 2024

KEY TAKEAWAYS

1. The quality of a mother's health before, during, and after pregnancy has lifelong impacts on the health and well-being of both mother and baby.
2. The national maternal mortality crisis is compounded in Texas by maternity care deserts across the state.
3. The best approach for preventing maternal death is ensuring adequate health care services before, during, and after pregnancy.
4. Midwives, doulas, home health nurses, and community health workers can help bolster the maternal care workforce, especially in rural communities.
5. Ensuring adequate and timely data collection and analysis of state maternal and infant morbidity and mortality is important to monitor trends.

PROBLEM

The quality of a mother's pregnancy determines the well-being of her infant and lays the foundation for a child's lifelong health trajectory.⁽¹⁾

- Prenatal experiences like maternal malnutrition, elevated levels of stress hormones, or exposure to toxins are linked to disease outcomes later in life through: (a) physiologic changes that can impact either the developing fetus directly or (b) the health of the mother, which in turn affects fetal development. (2,3)

Pregnancy can also impact the health of the mother beyond the birth of her child.

- Some women will develop medical issues like pre-eclampsia or gestational diabetes during pregnancy, which can lead to higher lifelong risks for conditions like cardiovascular disease, type 2 diabetes, and stroke. (4, 5)
- Pre-eclampsia, a serious form of high blood pressure during pregnancy, is linked to hemorrhaging, one of Texas's leading causes of pregnancy-associated deaths. (6,7)



THE U.S. CONSISTENTLY HAS THE HIGHEST MATERNAL MORTALITY RATES OF ANY OTHER HIGH-INCOME COUNTRY

The maternal mortality crisis in the U.S. is well documented.

- The most recent data published in 2023 by the National Center for Health Statistics show 32.9 maternal deaths for every 100,000 live births in 2021, up 64% in just two years from 20.1 per 100,000 in 2019. (9)
- Racial disparities in maternal mortality have persisted for years. (10) Black women in the U.S. are over 2.5 times as likely to die from pregnancy complications than white women are, regardless of socioeconomic status. (9)

UTHealth Houston School of Public Health



Texas Research on Policy Collaborative Program

TX RPC Project Researcher Publication

The Day-Level Association Between Child Care Attendance and 24-Hour Movement Behaviors in Preschool-Aged Children

- Physical activity (PA), screen time, and sleep are movement behaviors, each independently and collectively affecting health outcomes in preschoolers (3-5 years old).
- It is recommended that preschoolers should accumulate **at least 60 minutes** of moderate to vigorous PA per day, **≤1 hour of screen time** per day, and **10-13 hours of sleep** per night. However, only 11.3% of preschoolers met all 3 recommendations simultaneously.
- Kids who engage in structured environments generally engage in healthier behaviors. Center-based child care is the most common form of structure for preschool-aged children. This study explored whether attending child care affects these 3 movement behaviors among preschoolers.
- Preschoolers who attended more hours of child care had less overall screen time. On average, preschoolers spent 5 hours per day in child care; for every additional hour of attendance above the average, preschoolers had 0.3 hours less screen time that day.
- Leveraging existing infrastructure, including financial assistance for families to attend child care or increasing open hours of child care, could be strategies that promote child health behaviors.

National Women's Health Week



National Women's Health Week (NWHW) takes place **May 12-18** this year, highlighting women's health issues and priorities and encouraging women of all ages to prioritize their physical, mental, and emotional well-being. Each day of this observance week spotlights a different and timely women's health topic and provides engaging resources to spread the 2024 #NWHW messages. Register for virtual **events**, explore the daily topics, and access our ready-to-use **toolkit**.

Pediatric Brain Health Initiative Webinar



Challenges and Opportunities in Meeting the Mental Health Needs of Families in the Perinatal Period

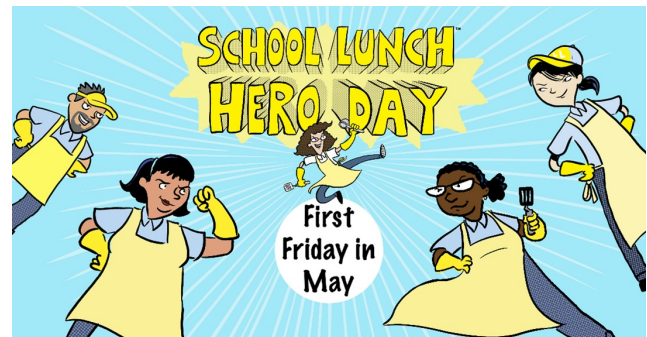
May 22, 2024, 12-1:30 PM CT

The Pediatric Brain Health Initiative's series will continue with this second webinar that covers:

- Dr. Darius Tandon's extensive research on perinatal mental health prevention.
- Mothers and Babies program, including the journey of research that paved the way.
- Evidence demonstrating the effectiveness of non-medical professionals in preventing depression.
- Significance of father-child relationship.

School Lunch Hero Day: 5/3/24

School Lunch Hero Day was May 3, a day to recognize school nutrition heroes for everything they do to build a healthy future for Texas children. Every school day, nutrition staff develop appealing menus, prepare meals that meet strict nutrition standards, and serve students with a smile. Thank you for providing **4.8 million healthy meals a day** in the Lone Star State!



School Lunch Hero Day reminds parents, students, school staff, and communities to show their appreciation for the nutrition team's commitment to being heroes and role models for Texas children. Everyone at the Texas Department of Agriculture wishes you a heart-warming, appreciation-filled, and well-deserved School Lunch Hero Day!

Resource Corner

The TX RPC Project develops accessible and accurate public health policy-related resources from field experts. If you would like to request information on a public health topic, please complete the following form:

[Access the Request Form](#)

See below for links to specific resource categories on our website:

- [Health Policy Resources](#)
- [Michael & Susan Dell Center for Healthy Living Webinars](#)
- [TX RPC Project Newsletters Archive](#)
- [Texas Legislative Bill Tracker](#)
- [Texas Child Health Status Reports and Toolkits](#)
- [Newsletter Resource Sharing Form for Publication](#)

About TX RPC Project

The [Texas Research-to-Policy Collaboration \(TX RPC\) Project](#) is a nonpartisan network that aims to bridge research and policy by supporting partnerships between child health researchers and legislators.

The TX RPC Project team and overall network are available to support Texas legislators with informational requests or resources related to health during the interim and in preparation for the 2025 Legislative Session.

If you and your legislative office are interested in collaborating with our team to receive data-driven information at state, district, and local levels, please reach out to TXRPCNetwork@uth.tmc.edu.

Contact Our Team

For more information, email TXRPCNetwork@uth.tmc.edu.

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